

Bob Marra named Humana Challenge executive director

Written by Larry Bohannon The Desert Sun

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Bob Marra succeeds Larry Thiel as executive director and CEO of the Humana Challenge in partnership with the Clinton Foundation. Marra gives a presentation in Palm Desert in this May file photo. / Crystal Chatham, The Desert Sun

With less than three months before the event is played, the Humana Challenge in partnership with the Clinton Foundation is making a change in leadership, with executive director Larry Thiel stepping down and being replaced by tournament board member Bob Marra.

John Foster, president of the 53-year-old PGA Tour tournament, said Thiel is retiring as executive director because he will have to spend more time in Colorado because of family medical matters.

“He will still be on our payroll on a consulting basis,” Foster said. “He had been looking at probably this being his last year of service. He has been looking at someone who would take his place and bring what we need as an executive director, and that’s Bob Marra.”

“I’m honored to have the opportunity to take on this incredible responsibility in this community,” said Marra, who has been a member of the Humana board of directors and is publisher of The Public Record newspaper. “The Bob Hope Classic is one of the first things I knew about this community.”

Foster said with Thiel’s sudden departure from the event after serving as tournament director for the last two years, the tournament needed to move quickly to fill the position.

“The tournament is coming on and with Larry gone, we are going to have to make a move,” Foster said.

“(Marra) has been working with our marketing folks, so it is not totally foreign to him. And we have Scott Easton, who has been the head of operations, so whatever you see on the course, you are going to see again, running very smoothly. And Larry will be checking in and helping Bob in any way he can.”

Foster also said many of the important decision about the 2013 event, which will be played Jan. 17-20 at three courses in La Quinta, have already been made and are in place.

“This thing works year-round. Everything is pretty well set up, now,” Foster said. “It’s just executing, selling pro-am spots, working with sponsors.”

Marra takes over as executive director and CEO of the tournament immediately, and he plans to utilize his strengths to keep the tournament’s momentum going from last January’s event, the first with the partnership of the tournament, Humana and the Clinton Foundation.

Former President Bill Clinton served as host of the event last year, even playing one pro-am round and recruiting PGA Tour players for the event.

“My greatest strength lie in the far-reaching and long-established relations in the community, business community and those in the non-profit organization world who need to be activated to a much greater level to understand the importance of this event to the community and get more involved in,” Marra said.

Marra said as the tournament moves forward it can no longer rely just on entry fees from pro-am events for the charitable funds the event distributes throughout the Coachella Valley.

“We need to develop significant long-term relationships with those in the community,” Marra said. “That’s my role, to act on the tournament’s new engagement with the community.”

Marra, who said he grew up watching the old Bob Hope Classic living in Delaware, pointed out the Humana is the only PGA Tour event in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

“This is the PGA Tour event of the Inland Empire, which has a larger population than 24 other states and a greater personal income than 21 other states,” Marra said. “I think we need to look at who can be potential partners for us.”

While Marra’s strengths are in marketing and sponsorship, he said he feels comfortable in the world of the PGA Tour and its players as well.

The 2012 Humana saw an increase in the number of top players who came to the tournament, which had been shortened from five days to four and moved from four courses to three for the week.

“I understand and I know that we have to build on strength of field,” Marra said. “We are going in that direction. When it comes to that, it’s relationships with management. You have to nurture relationships with players and agents. Having (Thiel) as council to me, I can jump in and fill that role.”

Marra said it is also important to remember the mission of the tournament is charity.

“The way I look at it and what I have shared with the staff already is we need to relish this position, what we get to do for the valley,” Marra said. “We get to help thousands of people by raises money for charities in this community.”